

YOUR
LETTERS

MAILBOX

Our readers are having serious trust issues, including an aversion to Vista, misgivings over the validity of ultimate guides and suspicions over the direction *Shopper* is taking

★ Star Letter Upgrade – or be damned



It is obvious that for the foreseeable future, you and the rest of the computer magazines are going to write a lot about Windows Vista. I don't blame you, because every new PC is going to come with Vista preinstalled, and I would guess the majority of readers will upgrade to a new system or try to give their current PCs an injection of RAM and then install the Vista upgrade.

However, I have had enough of this constant need to change. I just want my computer to work. I don't want to keep buying a new one, and I don't want to turn the one I own into a Frankenstein's monster following multiple upgrades. I appreciate that the hardware will fail when it gets too old, but until then I expect my PC to run with the minimum of expense.

What worries me is that the security updates for older versions of Windows will stop after a certain time, and I don't want to become a target for hackers just because I refuse to rent the latest version of Windows. I currently use Windows XP Professional Edition, which I believe is going to be supported for a while. When Microsoft decides to end XP's life, what are my options? Do I have any choice but to remain on the treadmill of upgrades?

Sandra Andrews

Owning a PC usually entails a certain amount of maintenance, whether that be buying consumables, upgrading bits and pieces to improve performance or just replacing broken parts. This is much the same with other complicated technical devices including cars, vacuum cleaners and kitchen appliances. We all have to replace things such as light bulbs, vacuum bags and extractor fan filters.

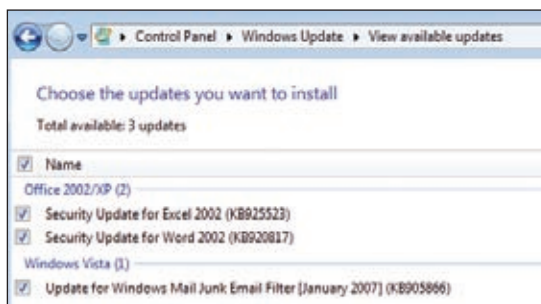
If your computer is capable of doing what you need it to today, it will be just as capable in five years, assuming that its power supply, hard disk and any cooling fans have survived. Replacing these is usually inexpensive and relatively simple, and you shouldn't have to do it very often.

Your comments about security fixes and the impression of merely renting software raise more serious issues. In theory, a bought copy of Windows can be used indefinitely, or at least until 19th January 2038. After that, many 32-bit operating systems will stop working due to a date-based bug not altogether dissimilar to the year 2000 bug. If you are using a 64-bit operating system, this shouldn't affect you.

However, the issue of security makes the practical situation different. There are plenty of people interested in finding more serious problems than the 2038 bug and using them to break into computers. We rely on companies such as Microsoft to fix the flaws when they are found. When Microsoft loses interest in an old operating system, the fixes stop coming and it is no longer safe to keep using the computer without upgrading.

Having said that, if you don't connect your computer to the internet and work exclusively with files from trusted sources, there is significantly less risk of being hacked. Under these circumstances, you could probably run a 64-bit version of Windows XP for as long as your hardware lasts.

One alternative is to install a free operating system, such as Linux. Don't think Linux is a world free of security problems, though. You'll still need to download updates regularly, probably upgrading to the latest release every three or four years. It just won't cost you any money to do so, aside from the price of your broadband connection.



▲ Microsoft will continue to supply security updates for older Windows versions for a while, but after that you're on your own



WHY BOTHER WITH VISTA?

What is it with Windows Vista, that we are persuaded we have to have it? The revolutionary new filing system has been withdrawn so, apart from a few security updates and tweaks, it might as well be called Windows XP Service Pack 3. Except that it will cost you a lot more. Sure, we will be treated to a new desktop. Big deal. Isn't that like buying a house because you like the wallpaper, forgetting that you could just redecorate your existing house?

Years ago, I realised that I was spending more time tweaking my operating system than doing anything useful with my computer. If your office suite, graphics package, interfaces and so on work OK, why worry about the operating system? It should only be an issue if things slow down or go wrong.

I have noticed that many new notebooks offer a free Vista upgrade when it becomes available. Reading the fine print, the company selling the notebook makes it clear that the contract would be with Microsoft and not with them. In other words, if

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there is a problem it's tough luck because the supplier doesn't want to know. At least if you get Vista preloaded you can say to your supplier: "It doesn't work. I don't know why, but I do know that it is up to you to fix it or give me my money back."

Joe Gentile

You don't mention which company indicated that Microsoft would have to support a messed-up Vista upgrade. The PC companies we've spoken to tell us that, if you buy a PC with a Windows Vista upgrade voucher and things go wrong, they would provide support. Microsoft was busy launching Windows Vista as we went to press, but the only available spokesperson also believed the support should come from the PC company.

There are more reasons to invest in Windows Vista than some fancy desktop wallpaper and security tweaks. The system has been redesigned with security in mind, which means that, although it may not be immediately apparent, there are security features running through Vista to its core rather than just sitting on top as they did with Windows XP. It should be much harder for malware to infect a Windows Vista system.



BETTER SAFE THAN SORRY

Your *Ultimate How To...* guide that came free with *Shopper* February 2007 provided instructions on clearing internet surfing history to protect privacy. It promised to show readers how to delete all traces of their surfing and download activities. I duly followed the instructions, and sure enough several months' worth of temporary internet files, together with cookies and the browsing history, were consigned to oblivion. Or so it appeared.

I happened to be flicking through last September's issue when I came across another article headed, "Protect your privacy in Windows XP". It proved more informative, stating: "Your PC's Index.dat files contain lists of every website you've ever visited and every cookie that's ever been on your PC."

Could this really be? My Temporary Internet Files and Cookies folders were now empty, and my browsing History was, well, history. Once again I followed your instructions, this time searching for Index.dat files. I found 35, and when I began opening them, sure enough there were all the websites I'd ever visited and every cookie I'd ever received, all recorded for posterity and accessible with just a few mouse clicks.

The article continued: "[Index.dat files] are locked, so they can never be deleted while you're running Windows. We'll show you how to get rid of them." You then explained an elaborate procedure that involved creating a file that had to be run using the Command Prompt in Safe Mode to delete all the Index.dat files. Ever sceptical, I selected my 35 files in the Search Results window and pressed Delete. Hey presto, they were gone. One remains, which is the cookies file that, as your article predicted, is now empty. So at least you got that right.

The only conclusion that can be drawn is that your 'ultimate' guide on clearing surfing history isn't worth the paper it's printed on. It

was inaccurate and misleading, lulling anyone who follows it into a false sense of security – literally. While September's article identified the problem more accurately, the solution it offered was cumbersome and unnecessary.

I appreciate that filling column inches must be a constant uphill struggle, but your readers expect to be able to rely on the advice you give out, especially on security matters, so please don't feed us bullshit. There are plenty of other computer magazines on the market.

Ken Jones

There is no silver bullet for securing your PC. You have to find a balance between what you consider to be convenient for you and what risk your data faces. For example, if you're setting up a surprise party for a member of the family, following our basic advice on clearing your surfing history would be adequate – unless you share your PC with a very technical (and paranoid) family.

The privacy article in *Shopper* September 2007 was an *Advanced Windows* tutorial, and so aimed at readers who are more confident with their PCs and happy to run through complicated procedures. Our advice regarding deleting these files from Safe Mode is accurate, and we'd question whether or not you have actually deleted the files using your method. Other software or old installations may have created Index.dat files, so you could have deleted the wrong ones. This shouldn't cause any problems, but it could mean your browsing history still remains on the system.

Even if you have managed to delete the right files, did you know they can probably still be recovered easily? This is because deleting files doesn't actually remove the data from the disk. It hides the files, and they may not be overwritten for weeks or months. To get rid of them now, you should use a utility to overwrite the empty areas of the hard disk. A program such as HDD Wipe Tool from <http://hddguru.com> should do the job.

None of the advice we have published is "bullshit", but it is geared at people with different levels of PC skill. To be honest, though, if you really need to remove your browsing history you should melt down the hard disk; see *Letters*, *Shopper* February 2007 for instructions on how to do this. It's the only way to be sure.



CONSUMER COUNSEL

Having just received the March 2007 issue of *Computer Shopper*, I wonder if the magazine is now catering for consumers generally, and not for those just interested in computers. The magazine is far from what it used to be, and the poorer for it.

Chris Meadows

Was it the headphones round-up or possibly the GPS Labs review that made you think *Shopper* is moving towards a more general, consumer readership? I wouldn't worry, though, because we're not. We are a computer magazine, pure and simple. Don't believe us? Consider what else was in that issue.

In that same issue we reviewed 26 PCs, five PDAs, eight storage devices, lots of networking equipment, graphics cards, processors, motherboards, the new Windows Vista operating system plus some software utilities. There was a feature on using email, an article about biometric profiling and over 10 pages of advice ranging from handling spyware infections to choosing a business accounts package. We also compared blogging tools and ran a main news story about Microsoft's attitude to digital rights management.

If that's not techie enough for you, did you find the four pages on optimising the Linux boot process using init and configuring different runlevels? How about *Programming Expert*, where readers could learn how to write their own email-notification system? *Upgrade Workshop* was hardly a consumer's walk in the park, either. We explained how to upgrade an optical drive – in a notebook PC.



FREE FOR ALL

It is very disappointing to see you are still describing trial software as full products. Simply increasing the time it can be used from 30 or 45 days to a longer period doesn't qualify. Either a product is full or it is restricted in some way, with a time limit or some features disabled. Three of the eight programs in a previous issue are described as full, but are actually six- to 12-month subscriptions. I realise it is better to be able to headline as high as possible a number of full applications, but what happened to honesty?

Fritz Teal ☺

WRITE IN AND WIN!

HP has kindly agreed to provide its award-winning HP DeskJet 5940 inkjet printer to this month's Star Letter writer. This smart-looking colour printer will do a good job of just about any task you throw at it, and it will do it fast.

It can take a six-ink cartridge for printing realistic photos and the cost per page is one of the lowest we've seen. With plenty of strengths and no major weaknesses, the 5940 has been on our 'Also consider...' list since its first review. It's the perfect all-rounder, and that's why we awarded it Best Inkjet Printer in our 2006 awards.



PLUS!

Every letter-writer who provides their address also receives a *Computer Shopper* mug



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Certain types of software are sold on a subscription basis. This is usually because it requires the ongoing services of the company that sells it. Examples include anti-virus software, online backup programs and some accounts packages. You wouldn't expect to pay £30 for an anti-virus program, and for the company to continue to provide updates for it in perpetuity without further payment. Neither would you expect an online backup service to provide gigabytes of storage over a period of years for a one-off payment of a tenner.

When we provide software on the cover disc, and label it as a full version, it is able to run unfettered of restrictions. If it is a subscription-based program, you get a certain number of months to use the service, just as you would if you bought it from a shop. This is not a con; it is simply the way that certain combinations of software and services are sold.



DAZED AND CONFUSED

I'm confused, and think I may have been duped. Last week, my son told me of a website called LimeWire where I could download music for a one-off fee. So I searched for LimeWire on the internet and got a list of sites. I think the one I picked was called LimeWireUnlimited.com, because the website layout is familiar.

I filled in my details and paid using my Visa card. I received no password to access the site, though I did get an email from Clickbank. I then sent an email to support@MymusicWeb sites.com that failed.

By this point I was suspicious, so I looked up Clickbank on the internet and found a website

called 2-Spyware.com, which stated that Clickbank is a FakeMessage system, and it went on to say how I can remove it.

So who do I believe? My card tells me I've paid over £30. The only reason I have not reported it is because I don't know whether I have got it wrong or not. If the website is fake, who do I report it to and how? At least I know you are genuine because I buy your magazine.

P McLoughlin

Unfortunately, you have been conned into paying over £30 for a free program. The LimeWire program, which is used to access the Gnutella file-sharing network, is free, although there is also a so-called Pro version that costs just \$18 (around £10). This is available from the official site at www.limewire.org.

The site at www.limewireunlimited.com charges money for a free program, and McAfee's SiteAdvisor service provides an analysis for the site that reads: "Feedback from credible users indicates that this site may be trying to sell you something which is normally available elsewhere for free." The download site has this to say: "All the software you download is free. You are paying for downloads, the online help and support as well as the online tutorials for the lifetime of the membership."

Don't get confused about the Clickbank email. While there is a spyware program that goes by the same name, Clickbank is also a legitimate service that enables businesses to take payments online. Complaining to this company about its client's behaviour is probably the best way to get a refund.

Award Retractions

To our great disappointment, two award-winning computers reviewed in recent issues have proved unavailable to buy. *Computer Shopper* hereby retracts the Best Buy awards given to the following products.

ARIA AXL FUSION HOME 3200

Computer Shopper began receiving complaints about Aria's award-winning £399 PC in January (it was reviewed in *Budget PCs*, *Labs*, *Shopper* February 2007). Readers told us they were being charged delivery (which should have been included), that the PC was unavailable online, that they were being offered a 17in monitor in place of the 19in widescreen reviewed and that delivery deadlines were being missed.

We raised our concerns with Aria on 11th January, but have been unable to get Aria to agree to supply a PC matching or equivalent to the model reviewed. The company has issued a statement, which can be read in its entirety on *Computer Shopper's* website.

"Regrettably, and due to circumstances beyond our control, Aria



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The Editor is always pleased to receive ideas for articles, preferably sent first in outline form, with details of the author's background and, where available, samples of previously published work. We cannot, however, accept responsibility for unsolicited copy and it may take time for us to reply.

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Technology have withdrawn from sale the Aria AXL Fusion Home 3200. As of the 24th January 2007, all customers who have ordered but not yet received their system will receive a full refund.

"After appearing in the magazine (on sale 14th December 2006), an initial problem was identified with regards to availability of the monitor included in this bundle. We firstly confirmed with our supplier the requirement of the previously reserved Xerox monitors, to be informed that our suppliers were out of stock but expected more stock in approximately four weeks. Once we were advised of the proposed lead time, we instantly notified our customers of this issue by posting details on our website and requesting the system be ordered by telephone only, to ensure any person intending to purchase this system was aware of the 28-day lead time. Unfortunately, and despite numerous attempts to guarantee the stock, on 24th January, we were informed that our order of Xerox monitors, purchased solely for the group test, would have to be cancelled.

"For this reason, we have decided to withdraw this system and refund customers who have not yet received their machine. We do not feel at this time that we are in the position to offer an alternative system of the same or closely similar specification within the same price point. Needless to say, we will not, in the future, be working with the supplier in question.

"We would also like to take this opportunity to apologise profusely to all our customers and *Shopper* readers affected by this cancellation."

When suppliers take part in our Labs reviews, they sign an agreement to supply their system as reviewed for a period of six weeks. Aria failed to do so, and disappointed a great many *Computer Shopper* readers, such as Andrew Bishop. He wrote to us to say: "Naturally, I am very dissatisfied with Aria's response and it will probably cost me at least £499 to get a computer with the same spec. I hope you can shame Aria into fulfilling their orders; I'm sure [it] could do it, but [it] wouldn't make as much money. However, in the long term this would be a good move, since this decision is going to destroy [its] credibility and reputation."

FUJITSU SIEMENS AMILO SI 1520 (SKU: GBR-100100-012)

Computer Shopper always checks the availability of reviewed products sold through retail outlets as we go to press. However, shortly after the publication of our March 2007 issue, supply of the specific Amilo Si 1520 model we reviewed dried up. This was despite Fujitsu Siemens' representative signing our agreement that the reviewed computer would be available for six weeks from our on-sale date.

Fujitsu Siemens blamed the representative (who no longer works for the company) and the release of Vista. Consumer product business manager Brad Hagan told us: "Many of our Amilo models are out of stock or hard to find in January as we are in the transition from XP to Vista.

"A typical replacement Si 1520 model with Windows Vista will include an Intel Core 2 Duo T5500 processor, 1GB RAM, 120GB disk, DVD



writer, wireless LAN and Bluetooth with Vista Home Premium preinstalled. At £799 including VAT, the replacement is superior to the £810 model reviewed and will be on sale in the UK from February."

While the replacement sounds good, the significant gap between the availability of the XP and Vista models breaks our Labs terms, so we are withdrawing the Best Buy award. We are also unhappy that Fujitsu Siemens couldn't put together a special offer for disappointed *Shopper* readers.

Happily, a runner-up in last month's Labs review has dropped significantly in price, and is widely available as we go to press. The Toshiba Satellite Pro U200-198 offers several advantages over the Amilo, including better battery life, a fingerprint scanner, Bluetooth and Windows XP Professional Edition, but requires a £40 memory upgrade to 1GB. It's widely available and widely reduced from last month's published price of £900. Check Froogle.co.uk for the best deal. **CS**

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